

Sefer HaBahir

The Book of Brilliance

An Ancient Guide To Experiencing Spiritual Truths

With Commentary
by Ariel Bar Tzadok

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***“Rabbi Nehuniah Ben HaKana says, one verse says,
“And now, they did not see light, it is brilliant, in the Heavens” (Job 37:21).
Another verse says, “He made darkness His hiding place,” (Psalm 12:18)
and “Clouds and darkness surround Him,” (Psalm 97:2).
This present a difficulty.***

***A third verse comes to reconcile between the two.
“Even darkness is not darkness to You and night, like day, will shine,
like darkness, like light, (Psalm 139:12).”***

With these words begin an ancient book of spiritual teachings from ancient times called the Bahir, the Book of Brilliance, based on the opening verse from Job quoted here.

The book Bahir is attributed to the ancient Sage Nehuniah Ben HaKana, who made here the original statement. This ancient master lived in the Holy Land around the time of the Second Temple. Whether or not he actually wrote this book or if it is merely ascribed to him, as some detractors suggest, is completely irrelevant to the teachings therein. The book contains essential lessons of valuable spiritual truths that when understood properly and practiced accurately, will enable one to experience the primordial light referenced here in this opening teaching.

We must establish from the beginning a vital spiritual rule. All spiritual learning and pursuits must absolutely be founded upon a foundation of experience and not just upon an academic/intellectual pursuit of informational knowledge. As the Bible clearly states, *“Adam knew his wife Eve,”* (Gen. 4:1). According to Biblical standards knowledge is a deep and intimate experience. It is not at all academic or a mere exercise of intellect. When we come to studying the Bahir, we must keep this in mind.

Words, like love are meant to enter the heart and to transform it. Words that enter only into the head are not considered learned by Biblical standards. This is why G-d commands that, *"these words which I command you this day shall be upon your hearts,"* (Deut. 6:6). Thus, as we come to contemplate the Bahir, I will endeavor to inspire your hearts to contemplate these words and at the same time silence your minds. As you open up in the proper way, you will indeed be able to receive wisdom in the proper way. This reception is what we call in Hebrew, Kabbalah. Welcome to the world of real and proper study.

The opening teaching reveals to us a profound contradiction. How is it that G-d is both the Creator of light and darkness, good and evil. How is it that both serve Him equally? Isaiah 45:7 states, *"I form light, I create darkness, I make peace and I create evil, I YHVH (G-d) create all these."* Here we are introduced to the ultimate paradox. Good and evil are both Divine creations and both serve Heaven's purpose equally. This is a paradox unfathomable to mortal humans, whereas in the Eyes of Heaven, no such paradox exists. This is what this opening teaching comes to reveal to us.

G-d's ultimate wisdom, His light, is far above human comprehension, as it is written, *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says YHVH (G-d). For as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isaiah 55:8-9). G-d's reasons and the purposes of His actions are beyond mortal understanding. We do not understand why G-d allows evil to exist, why He created it and how He uses it to accomplish His purposes, which themselves are unfathomable to us. We do not see the light. It is too brilliant (bahir) for the mortal human mind to comprehend. This light, this comprehension, is in Heaven, unreachable to those trapped on Earth. Yet, not all human beings are so earthbound. There are those who can gaze upon the supernal light, if and when they learn and practice the spiritual ascent, the teachings of which are included in this book.

The text, after quoting Job, that the brilliant light is in Heaven, quotes two verses that state that G-d (who is in Heaven) is surround by darkness and clouds. The apparent contraction is that how can G-d who is basked in the light of Heaven and at the same time be concealed in darkness and clouds? The answer is found in yet a third verse which states that, to G-d, light and darkness are equal and the same. Herein is our paradox. G-d's reality and our human reality are different.

This is why we have such a hard time understanding spiritual truths. We are always trying to understand the world above in accordance to the rules below. We forget the basics of common sense, that a round peg does not fit neatly into a square whole. This is a simple fact that does not require extensive intellectual contemplation in order to recognize its truth.

The Bahir, recognizing that experiencing spiritual truths is far different than just merely reading about them or contemplating them intellectually, begins with this basic spiritual truth to enable its readers to delve further into its teachings. Neither of these former ways gives one a first-degree experience with the realities described. As such, any knowledge that is not experiential knowledge is, in actuality, no knowledge at all. Only one who has touched a thing can be said to know that thing. Thus, the Bahir comes to teach one how to touch Heaven and experience what, for humans, may be a paradox of light and darkness, concealment and revelation.

With the experience of such a spiritual ascent comes the realization of the underlying objective unity of all, which is YHVH (G-d), who is in all and is all. Acknowledging this concept and experiencing it first hand can be compared to reading a novel about a fantasy love affair verses actually being in love with another real person and having a passionate and intimate relationship with that significant other. Indeed, another famous Kabbalist, Rabbi Yitzhak of Acco (in the book Reshit Hokhma of Eliyahu DeVidas, Section on Love 4:32) is quoted as saying, *“that one who has never had passion towards a woman is similar to a donkey and less than one at that. The reason for this is that it is from this that we come to recognize how to perform service for the Divine. With this will you understand the meaning of the word “hafetz” (desire).”*

Anyone who has ever been in love with a real person knows from experience the ups and downs that come with any relationship, especially one ignited by passion. In this respect, Heaven and Earth do not differ. In coming to know the Ways of Heaven, one must understand that coming to know that which, to us, appears to be in the darkness is like penetrating a mystery. Only those with passion and resolve will successfully navigate the darkness to discover the light concealed within. As it is with the relationship of love below, so too is it with the relationship of love between Heaven and Earth. Only the passionate and resolute will persevere and survive.

The secret of spiritual penetration is also subtly hinted to here in the format of the teaching itself. First, one verse is quoted, then an apparently contradictory verse is quoted and finally a third verse is quoted, offering a reconciliation between the original two. The secret of ascent is the secret of one, two, three, or if you will, right, left, center.

This triangle is also expressed in different terms in another ancient classic text of Torah spirituality called the Sefer Yetzirah. In the opening teachings of this book it states that G-d created His world using three derivatives of the word “book.” In Hebrew these three are Sefer, Sappar and Sippur. The academic commentaries to the Sefer Yetzirah all make the same mistake as do the academic commentaries to

the Sefer Bahir and interpret these matters as some form of academic, intellectual statement and process. However, those practicing the secrets of ascent, known from experience that these academic approaches to understanding fall far from the mark and almost always misguide the readers from ever discovering the actual truths of spiritual ascent practices.

The Sefer, Sapar and Sippur in Sefer Yetzirah refer to three modes of human consciousness, which must be experienced individually and then weaved together in a tapestry of mind expansion. I, the author, explain these matters in-depth in my lessons on the Sefer Yetzirah. I will recommend all students interested in the Sefer Yetzirah to investigate my 40-hour audio course on the text.

The three modes of consciousness referred to in Sefer Yetzirah are also referred to here. Like in the Sefer Yetzirah, they are referenced at the beginning of the text, because without experiential knowledge of these three one is never able to develop the necessary mental powers to transcend physical consciousness and to experience the higher worlds, which as we mentioned above appear paradoxical to the mortal, rational human mind.

Indeed, even in the Talmud, Rabbi Akiva, who was himself a master of spiritual ascent, warned against trying to understand the spiritual paradox using rational, human intellect. In the Talmud (Hagigah 14b), this warning is concealed in mysterious terms, but it was clear to his fellow adepts. *"Rabbi Akiva said to them, When you come to the place of pure marble stones, do not say, Water! Water! for it is said, He who speaks untruths shall not stand before My eyes. (Psalms 101:7)."*

The three modes of consciousness can be described here using the metaphors of the scripture verses themselves. They are light, darkness and the combination of the two. These can be understood as the three modes of consciousness, the conscious, the unconscious and the trance state that unites the two. These three must be cultivated to work in harmony in order to harmonize Heaven and Earth, with the individual human being being the bridge that unites the two.

The rational, intellectual, academic human mind aspires to see G-d's light, but recognizes that it is always out of reach, far away, in that place which we call Heaven. The intellectual mind is structured for experiencing this physical world, but it is completely incapable of experiencing Heavenly reality because Heavenly reality is so totally opposite of everything physical reality is. Therefore, the academic mind by its very nature cannot see or perceive that which is outside the very mode of its parameters. This is why psychic, intuitive and spiritual phenomena are so vehemently denied by the rational, academic types. They claim that it is not scientific and therefore does not exist. It is so unfortunate that these arrogant fellows consider the entire universe to be as small as their minds can conceive.

Once one is willing and able to go beyond what the senses can see, one can then begin the ascent into the spiritual domain. Yet, the first experience into this domain is one of darkness. Upon experiencing this, many turn back in frustration and discontinue their ascent, considering it hopeless or false. Only those who persevere through the darkness eventually come to the light on the other side. This experience was Biblically recorded in other words in the description of Ezekiel's chariot and in Elijah's vision in the cave.

The spiritual scent of which we speak is thus the ascent into prophecy and attachment with G-d. Only those who do it right will achieve it. As for all others, they will continue to stumble in the darkness until they are willing to realize and embrace the spiritual paradox, something which the rational intellect cannot fathom. So, the Bahir begins with its own paradox and teaches one how to overcome it.

As we proceed through the text, we will see more and more how this text too, regardless of its actual authorship or antiquity is still a guide to prophetic ascent that when learned properly and applied accurately will enable the practitioner to accomplish the great task of basking in the Heavenly brilliance (Bahir), thus the name of the book.

***“Rabbi Berakhia says,
It is written, “and the land was Tohu (void) and Bohu (desolate)” Gen. 1:2.***

What is implied here by the use of the word “was”?

That it already “was.”

What is Tohu (void)?

It is something that confounds human beings.

And what is Bohu (devastation)?

Rather at first there was Tohu and it returned to be Bohu.

What is Bohu?

Something which has substance, as it is written, Bo-Hu (it is in it).”

Bahir 2

In the first instruction of this book we were introduced into the triad consciousness of the mind paradox. Now, unseen to most academic commentaries to the text, this section continues from the last and proceeds to direct us in the path of spiritual ascent.

The Rabbi quoted here may or may not be an historical figure. What is important is his name. Berakhia translates as G-d, (specifically the two first letters of YHVH, Yod Hey) is my blessing. The name Berakhia begins with the Hebrew letter Bet, as does the word Berakha (blessing) and the word Bereshit (in the beginning). This is no coincidence as we shall see in the next lesson.

The Torah begins with revealed creation and thus begins with the first letter of revealed sound, this being the Hebrew letter Bet. The first letter of the Hebrew alphabet Alef has no sound, no pronunciation and thus no representation other than in the eye, and not in the ear. This is significant in that the eyes and ears are symbols for the two worlds of the mind paradox, spoken of in the first teaching and these two correspond to the first two letters of G-d's Name YHVH (Yod and Hey), referred to in the name of Rabbi Berakhia.

Sight corresponds to the domain of the unconscious and sound to the realm of consciousness. In the unconscious we see images and intuit through psychic insight their meanings. These images are called archetypes. Sound, on the other hand, refers to words and these require structured language in order to be understood. As we shall see these two modes of mind, the visual psyche and the verbal intellect are the rudimentary forms that materialize as the micro-cosmic Tohu and Bohu respectively.

The letter Alef represents that domain of the mind, which is the root of the unconscious and is the source of all. As such, it is hidden and impenetrable. It is not a domain that we can access and explore with the faculty of intellect. However, emanating forth from its depths comes the two realms of the mind we know as the

accessible unconscious and the conscious. These correspond to the the two letters of G-d's Name Yod and Hey and these in turn correspond to the Heavens and the Earth and the spiritual and physical domains respectively. These two domains are what is referred to in Gen. 1:2 as the Tohu and Bohu.

Granted these two states also reflect the macro-cosmic primordial state of the early natural universe. The reason for this is because the birth of the universe itself was the primordial form from which the birth of human consciousness is patterned. Thus, it is taught that humanity is the microcosm of the universe (Hesed L'Avraham 4:1). The human mind came into existence following the same "blueprints" as did the universe itself. This correlation is of vital importance, for because of it and through it we have a window to outside our own restricted mind and into the universal mind, which is the "throne" (Kiseh/Malkhut) of the Creator.

The purpose of the author writing this book, the Bahir, is to inform us about specific information about our inherent human nature as well as to instruct us how to become cognizant of the spiritual and to experience its reality. Informing one about a thing means nothing if such a thing cannot be experienced and seen for oneself. Spiritual reality is described by many, almost always in contradictory forms. This is why we have such variants in religions, religious teachings and all the wars and conflicts that go on between them. All this divisiveness and conflict is due to the single cause of people arguing over things they do not experience and thus cannot prove.

When, however, one is able to achieve spiritual ascent, most such disagreements dissipate in the inner light of spiritual realization and personal experience. The author of the Bahir and the authors of many other books in the authentic Torah traditions always strive to teach experience over doctrine and practice over rote. The Bahir thus begins with instructions about the macro-cosmic universe and the micro-cosmic human mind. One reflects the other and from the one we come to experience the other.

The Tohu and Bohu spoken of in Genesis 1:2 refer to the primordial states that existed in the early universe. Tohu and Bohu also refer symbolically to primordial states of human consciousness. Human consciousness is said to mirror the pattern of the "Divine Consciousness of the Universal Mind." This term, more than most, is a good description and definition of that which we so mythologically refer to as G-d. It also helps us to understand what Torah means when it says that man is created "in the Image of G-d." The inner workings of human consciousness mirror the workings of the Universal Mind. As I said above, humanity is the microcosm and G-d is the macrocosm. One mirrors and reflects the other.

The Tohu and Bohu states in the primordial universal refer to a time before either energy or matter congealed into their presently recognizable shapes. Indeed, many of the ancient Sages, such as RaMBaN, write in their commentaries to Genesis that prior to G-d creating the actual forms of the Heavens and the Earth, He first created a “prima-matter,” the first essence, from which came forth all else. The Sages of Israel referred to this “prima-matter” by its Greek name, apparently used by the Sages of that country. They refer to the “prima-matter” as the Hiyuli.

Now, we know that physical matter has four forms, the physical, liquid, gaseous and plasmic states. These are referred to in all ancient literature as earth, water, air and fire respectively. The Hiyuli is the mysterious fifth element. The Hiyuli is the force that enables the others to take form. The Hiyuli, therefore, is not a form of matter as we would define it today. Rather, the Hiyuli is actually the Conscious Force, the inner instructions that tells everything what it is supposed to be. The Hiyuli is what Genesis 1:2 refers to as the Tohu. Although Tohu is translated as “void,” it contains a depth of meaning far more than any single translation can offer.

Now, the purpose of this writing is not to instruct us about Genesis, but rather to explain to us how the Tohu, and later the Bohu are mirrored in human consciousness and how they impart within us humans the ability to transcend our limited mortality to spiritually ascend to experience the greater universe. We each have within us a deeply buried level within our unconscious that corresponds to the Hiyuli. This fifth element within us is the root of our existence as a singular sentient entity. This level of source consciousness is what enables us to connect with everything and everyone else in creation.

The Tohu level of consciousness is the root of individual existence. It is the source and thus the crown. When we speak of the levels of Divine consciousness, we refer to them as Sefirot, popularly portrayed as ten spheres aligned in a specific pattern. The first of these sefirot is called Keter, the crown. This is the Hiyuli. It is the raw, gut essence that defines and drives existence and identity. It is the deepest and source level of all individual consciousness. It is from here that all processes of the mind and consciousness develop. Yet, due to its most fundamental nature, it is a level of consciousness, which by definition never becomes conscious. It is the primordial “nothing” within. As such, although one can delve into the depths of one's soul to “touch” this inner Hiyuli, still, the only experience of it will be that which extends out from it, but there can never be an experience of “it” itself.

From the Tohu/Hiyuli emanates forth a spark of awareness that contains within it the seed and kernel of all that is to manifest according to the process latent within the macro-cosmic universe and the micro-cosmic individual mind. This seed contains all that is to come and is thus referred to as the Bohu, which as the text has shown us literally is broken down into two words, Bo and Hu, which translates as “it is in it.” In

the domain of the sefirot, Bohu is referred to as the second one, Hokhma, which emanates out from Keter.

It must be remembered that Keter and Hokhma and all the sefirot are levels of consciousness. They are not abstract, philosophical or metaphysical concepts. They are actual and real levels of the human psyche that show us the inner patterns of human psychological development. Without this experiential element, all knowledge about the sefirot is bound to be misguided and thus wrong. One cannot know about a thing unless one has an experience with said thing. It is in the interaction that comes awareness and exposure to reality. Without this there is neither any spiritual ascent or psychological growth.

Within the Bohu are all levels of human consciousness found in their primordial state. In the universe this corresponds to the fundamental forms of matter prior to their merging into the forms that we know today. We might refer to the Tohu level of existence as the level of energy, the chi, orgone and nefesh level that underlies all form. Then we may refer to the Bohu level as the initial atomic and sub-atomic structures that precede manifest form. It is because we human beings have within us deeper levels of consciousness corresponding to both the macro-cosmic Tohu and Bohu that we are able to access them within ourselves and thus through our individual micro-cosmic essences reach out and touch the macro-cosmic. This is the great secret of how the human mind can be developed to take control over forms of matter. The path of this psychological descent into the recesses of one's inner self has long been called by the Sages as the "descent" before the Divine Throne. In Hebrew, this is called the Ma'aseh Merkava.

Those who could reach within themselves to not only touch their inner Tohu but also extract a seed of it through one's internal Bohu is able to gaze upon anything in the physical world and by a sheer act of properly focused concentration will the physical shape of a thing to restructure itself into any other shape. This is how the ancient masters (and some modern ones) are able to perform what we call miracles. The properly trained mind delves into the depths of one's personal Bohu and Tohu and within that place recognizes the unity of all Bohu and Tohu in the micro-cosmic mind and the macro-cosmic universe.

In this state of unity and integration, the individual then gazes within upon a form and by the power of will changes one form into another. The Sefer Yetzirah instructs one how to do this using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet as the symbols that enable one to delve into their individual Bohu and thus combine and recombine the letters forming whatever forms one wishes. With practice and discipline the individual mind can be trained to do almost anything, including changing lead into gold.

...like these
themselves

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***"Why does the Torah begin with [the Hebrew letter] Bet?
Because [the Bet is] the beginning [letter of the word] Berakha (blessing).***

And from where do we learn that the Torah is called a blessing?

***It is written, "all full of the blessing of YHVH,
possess the sea and the south" (Deut. 33.23).***

There is no [mention of] the sea other [than in reference] to the Torah,

As it is written, "it is wider than the sea," (Job 11:9).

And what does "all full of the blessing of YHVH," mean?

Rather in every place where it says Bet, this is the language of blessing.

As it is written, "the beginning," (Gen. 1:1),

and there is no beginning other than wisdom.

As it is written, "the beginning of wisdom is the fear of YHVH" (Psalm 111:10)

There is no wisdom other than blessing,

as it is written, "And YHVH blessed Solomon."

And it is written, "And YHVH gave wisdom to Solomon (1 Kings 5:26).

Compare this to a king who wed his daughter to his son,

***and gave [her] to him at the wedding and said to him, "
do with her as you wish."***

Bahir 3

We cannot delve into the unknowable realm of the ineffable Alef. It is above sound and thus above the mind to grasp. Of Alef, all we can do is inquire about it. Yet, ask as we will, there can never be any answers. The domain of the Alef is presently beyond human comprehension.

Therefore human consciousness begins with the domain of the Bet, and right away we stumble across a tremendous problem caused by the philosophical Kabbalists because of their lack of first-degree experience in spiritual ascent. To the philosophical Kabbalists, the domain of the Alef is Hokhma and thus the human unconscious. For them, the Bet is the beginning of human intellect, known amongst the sefirot as Binah (the realm of intellect).

For the philosophical Kabbalists, the intellect is their highest domain of achievement. They never delve into the unconscious and because of this they have misidentified and confused the true identity of the Alef and the Bet.

Alef is the domain of the sefirah Keter, the seat of Will, the source of Self. Hokhma is the second realm, the true domain of the letter Bet, the realm of the unconscious, the place where the supernal Will, called wisdom, manifests an aspect of itself. The Bet corresponds to the unconscious mind of the sefirah Hokhma, not the conscious mind of the sefirah Binah, which should rightly be called Gimel (the third letter in the Hebrew alphabet).

The Torah begins with Bet, and includes the creation of both the Heavens and the Earth. The Earth corresponds to the conscious mind associated with the physical world. Heaven corresponds to the unconscious mind associated with the spiritual world. Both are creations of YHVH and we human beings have access to both within ourselves.

The Bet, also having the value of two, indicates that it represents the second layer of the unconscious concealing within it the deeper source Will (Keter). As the value of two, it also corresponds to the dual creation of Heaven and Earth, the spiritual and the physical and the unconscious and conscious aspects of the mind. Unless one knows and embraces both, then one does not know that which ELOHIM has made and thus can never penetrate to know YHVH, the Name and level of the Divine associated with the descent into the unconscious, into first-degree spiritual ascent and experience.

Only one with actual experience in spiritual ascent, that which is traditionally called Ma'aseh Merkava, can be said to have received a blessing from YHVH. Yet, in order to understand this, we must understand what exactly is a Berakha (blessing). It certainly is not just good wishes that one bestows upon another. A Berakha is an actual bestowal of life-force creative energy, the Nefesh, Chi or Orgone. It is an actual thing, not merely good wishes. Wishing someone well is just fine, but mere words alone, however much passionately spoken and intended, does not meet the criteria of the Biblical definition of the term Berakha (blessing).

When one is actually blessed, one has received an influx of spiritual energy imbued within one's unconscious. Then, through the process of spiritual ascent, one taps into the reservoir inside oneself and unleashes that which has been placed there. If the spiritual influx has not been placed there, then the individual does not have much from which to draw upon. As such, the individual does not have strong inner resources to accomplish whatever tasks or desires that he may so desire. This is why so many people today fail in their life's endeavors. Simply stated, they are not blessed, nor do they understand what it really means to receive the power of the blessing.

The power of the blessing was well known in Biblical times. Genesis 27 records the famous story of Issac's call to bless his son Esau and how Jacob intercepted that blessing. Because a blessing is such a potent force, Mother Rivka craved it for her son Jacob and wanted to prevent her other son Esau from acquiring it. Isaac's words to his son(s) were not mere words of good wishes. No, Isaac was actually imbuing his son with a powerful spiritual component that would enable him to accomplish great deeds. When Esau realized he had lost this, he knew he would forever be at a disadvantage before his brother Jacob. This is why he sought to kill him and why the descendants of Esau hate the descendants of Jacob to this day.

Yet, inevitably the blessing of father Isaac will eventually prevail and Esau will ultimately succumb to his brother Jacob. This is the power of the blessing. It takes on a life of its own. One way or another the power of the blessing seeks to accomplish that for which it came, at the behest of G-d, the Creator.

So, creation began with the Bet of Berakha (blessing) to teach us that this Divine power and purpose, this Nefesh, Chi or Orgone, permeates everything in creation and that ultimately creation will fulfill the purpose for which it was created. It is inevitable.

Torah also begins with Bet, for Torah is G-d's chosen agent and form that permeates human consciousness and enables the individual to have access to the penetrating power that unlocks the unconscious and unleashes the inherent Bet (of Berakha) latent within each of us. Thus Torah is called Berakha (blessing) because it is the source of life and the guide into the inner recesses of the unconscious mind.

Chanting words of Torah in accordance to specific formulas unlocks closed channels in the unconscious and enables one to spiritually travel, to ascend before the Throne of G-d. This is why this work is called the Ma'aseh Merkava, the work of the chariot. This is the mental work performed that unleashes the mind enabling it to penetrate the Earth, to rise to Heaven and thus stand before the metaphorical Throne. Sitting upon the Throne is one with the image of G-d (as seen in Ezekiel's vision), experienced as the Bet, yet, concealing within it the ineffable Alef, G-d's true unknown and unknowable "Face."

The Torah itself is considered a metaphor for the unconscious mind. Just like the human mind has its superficial surface layer covering over depths and layers within, so too does the Torah have its surface level called Pshat and its inner depths called Sod. Yet, Pshat and Sod are not as the philosophical Kabbalists would have one believe to be subjects of study, but rather Pshat and Sod are methods of study. Pshat and Sod differ as do the conscious mind and the unconscious. Indeed, in Kabbalistic literature the difference between the two are often symbolized as the difference between sight and sound, with sight being Sod and sound being Pshat.

Sound communication requires words and sentences, which is in itself a very limited and rigid form of communication. If one does not know the language one understands little. Sight however is completely different. A picture is worth a thousand words and speaks to all equally without need of speech. For example, I can ask a hungry man if he wants an apple, yet if he does not understand my language, my question is not understood and goes unanswered, the result being he may die of hunger. Yet, if I take out an apple and show it to him, then without words, he expresses by deed his desire for the apple, takes it, eats and thus saves his life.

Pshat is academic and philosophical. It is platonic. It is full of words and talk and lacks every bit of experience. Sod, on the other hand, arises from within in that place where the human soul meets the soul of the Torah itself, this is the domain of the concealed Alef. From here it arises out of the unconscious depths, with aspects, recollections and insights bubbling into consciousness, giving rise to revelations. These arise from within the depths of the unconscious in similar manner to how something could rise from the depths of the sea. One does not see where it comes from, other than to see that it comes from deep within. Therefore is the Torah compared to the depths of the sea. As the source from which come forth the unconscious content, Torah is called the source of blessing. For there is no greater blessing, influx of life-force energy, more than clarified thought and directed will, that when joined together make almost every endeavor possible to achieve.

The verse says that the fear of G-d is the beginning of wisdom. Here we see the relationship between the acquisition of unconscious content, always referred to as Hokhma (wisdom) and what is here called the fear of G-d. This term, in Hebrew, Yirat YHVH, does not actually mean "fear," but rather "awe." Awe is an experience of being overwhelmed beyond that which can be described by words. Awe means recognizing one's smallness in comparison to the others overwhelming largeness. Again, this is not an academic acknowledgment of the facts, but rather a deeper, almost emotional experience of them.

When one reaches this level of experience of recognizing and experiencing the awesomeness of the Presence of the Divine, this is said to be the first step into a greater world. This is the beginning of wisdom. It is from this initial state of experience that one can then be guided by internal content bubbling up from deep within one's unconscious and from deep within the Torah. In harmony, like male and female, one's internal intuition guides one to see things in Torah not perceivable to the philosophical mind.

This is how King Solomon was able to achieve a level and depth of wisdom unattained by all others both before him and after him. He could gaze upon the words of Torah and through them unlock the secrets of creation. This was the power of Adam prior to the fall in Eden. Only the experiential Kabbalist who descends before the Merkava has any knowledge and experience of this. To all others, the Torah is a closed book of mere words and sentences, interpreted over and over again, but never getting to the depths of what those words really mean. Rightly did Rabbi Eliyahu, the Gaon of Vilna say in his book, Even Shelayma. that those who do not know Sod will never properly understand Pshat.

The relationship of the inner mind and the inner Torah can be compared to husband and wife, or as the Bahir states, as the son and daughter of the King wedded. This symbol refers to the son of the King, the unconscious content of the mind, the sefirat

Hokhma within, wedded to the deeper levels within the Torah, which is both the inner levels of Binah, intellect and Malkhut, form. Do with her as you wish, the Bahir states. In other words, the unconscious mind, tapped into direct first-degree experience of G-d can gaze upon the Torah and see within it that which others cannot. This interaction of intuitive mind and intuitive Torah can rightfully be compared to the act of erotic love-play.

Only when one sets out on the proper path can one ever expect to arrive at the proper destination. Philosophical Kabbalah is an excellent philosophy and offers keen psychological insights into human nature. Yet, many of its later forms have become bogged down in meaningless details that take the mind of the believer into places and domains far from the experiential truths which he seeks.

Mental traps are as dangerous as any of the physical counterparts. The Bahir comes to show us the path to experience and the proper techniques how to acquire it. Let those who wish to walk the true golden path, first silence their mouths from speech and their minds of philosophical contemplations (Sefer Yetzirah). Delve into the unconscious through the means that will be shown and come to see the Throne and the One who sits upon it. This is the act of true-love and it can only come about by the previous surrender to the awe that arises from within.

“And how do we know that the [word] blessing (Berakha) is derived from the word Barukh (blessed)?

Maybe it is derived from the word Berekh (knee)?

It is written, “For to Me every knee will bow” (Is. 44:23), the place where every knee bows.

What can this be compared to?

To those who request to see the face of the king, but they do not know where the king is, nor where his house is.

They [must] ask first where is the king's house and only afterward ask where is the king?

Therefore, “to Me every knee shall bow” and those above, every tongue shall swear.”

Bahir 4

Here we have revealed to us many secrets in the path of ascent. Words in Hebrew are potent in meaning. As is known, there are no vowels in the Hebrew alphabet, therefore, two completely different words can be spelled exactly the same, only to be differentiated by how they are pronounced, with different vowels. In some books, such as modern Hebrew Bibles, words are written with vowels, however original Torah scrolls contained none. Written vowels in Hebrew are of rather modern origin when compared to the antiquity of the letters themselves. Therefore, the meanings of ancient texts, the Torah and the rest of the Bible included was orally passed down from generation to generation until the invention of written vowels and the widespread adoption of their usage.

It would seem clear to us that the Hebrew word for blessing (Berakha) would come from the root Barekh (to bless). What the Bahir wishes to address here is a simple, yet true question, when viewed from the perspective of Hebrew grammar. The Hebrew word for knee is Berekh. It is spelled identically to the word Barekh (to bless), the only difference between the two are their vowels. So, the Bahir asks, how do we know that Berakha comes from Barekh and not Berekh? One can offer a simplistic answer based upon the traditions of Hebrew grammar. Yet, the Bahir is not here to challenge basic Hebrew grammar. The author's intent in his question is to subtly, in coded form, reveal to us a secret teaching. This teaching is the secret of receiving Divine blessing.

The verse in Isaiah says, “every knee shall bow.” The bowing of the knee, on one level, signifies total subservience. This is the absolute essential step in any path of spiritual ascent. One must give up his/her attachments to this world and be willing to surrender completely to the Will of Heaven, regardless of whatever this may mean. This psychological prerequisite is the essential criteria for unleashing the individual mind from its attachments to the things of this world and all the psychic focus we place on them. Surrender means enabling the mind to float free, in a state

of detachment from anything physical. In this state the inner mind/soul can then begin to control mental navigation and allow the mind to naturally flow towards spiritual perceptions and reality.

This mental state of detachment is called in Hebrew, Hitbodedut. Literally it means isolation. This is an isolation of the mind, in a state of detachment from any and all physical concerns. While some modern Hasidic philosophies have adopted this term Hitbodedut to describe their prayer practices and traditions, they have only adopted the word itself. Its actual inner meanings and applications are completely unknown to them.

Surrender and isolation of the mind, symbolized by the bending of the knee, a symbol of submission, is not a state that is as easily acquired as falling down on one's physical knees. Although the process of releasing the mind is an arduous one and it is symbolized by the bowed knee, the relationship to the bowed position and the bending of the knee is much more than merely a metaphorical association. The process of mental isolation is closely associated with a physical body position that actually assists one greatly to focus the mind away from the physical world. This bodily position is known as the position of the prophet.

The position is mentioned with regards to Elijah in 1 Kings 18:42. It is performed by the prophet bowing down completely on his knees and then bending his entire body, lowering the forehead to the ground directly opposite the knees. One's buttocks should be resting close to one's feet, one's head on the ground and one's hands should be to the sides of one's face, with the fingers open and spread wide, just opposite the mouth and the ears. One is essentially curled up into a ball.

Needless to say, one who is overweight and has any amount of stomach or abdominal fat cannot get into this position. As such, being overweight is considered to be a significant impediment to not only getting into what is called the prophetic position, but also to acquiring mental isolation, the bowing of the mind before Heaven. One who is significantly overweight indicates a strong attraction to food for the flesh and indicates other strong attachments to this physical world. One who is so attached to this world cannot become attached to the spiritual world. Therefore, one of the foundational practices of spiritual discipline is to fast.

Fasting is done to gain control of the physical body, by controlling its most natural physical desires and needs. Those who do not fast or speak against fasting indicate their distance from actual accomplishments in spiritual ascent. No one, but no one, who is obese can connect with Heaven. All such ones will have only their philosophical or other religious accomplishments, but they will never be able to transcend the physical, simply because they are too weighed down, both physically and spiritually.

Now, the power in the prophetic position is by no means magical. There is nothing mystical or symbolic about it. It is almost similar to a fetal position and in this is its true biological power. When the body is curled up in the proper manner, one finds that one cannot breathe deeply, but only shallowly. This subtle and slight lack of oxygen actually helps the mind to detach from physical attachments and to focus on inner realities. This position also aligns up the body's internal life-force energy, enabling it to circulate almost cyclically.

These biological occurrences therefore affect the consciousness enabling an easier realignment with inner reality. This then is the secret of the position of the prophet. Again, there is nothing mystical or magical about it, rather it is purely biological in nature. But the bottom line is that it works to induce the psychic state of mind necessary for spiritual ascent.

Submission and surrender must be both physical and psychological. It is not enough that one is intent upon mental surrender to God. More than this must also be accomplished in that one's physical body must also be properly aligned. One's physical body is here symbolized as the house of the king. Unless one first seeks the king's house one will never see the king's face. This means that one must prepare and discipline one's flesh first before one will be able to discipline and prepare one's spirit. This is the natural way and it is essential that this be learned and practiced in order for there to be any success in the path of ascent.

The bowing of the knee is the surrender of the flesh before God. In this comes true blessing. So, essentially even though the word Berakha (blessing) literally comes from the root verb Barekh (to bless), its symbolic relationship with Berekh (knee) indicting surrender and submission is also implied. For being that blessing is an actual flow of spiritual energy that descends from above to dwell upon those below, it can only reside in a vessel that is empty and waiting to be filled. Thus surrender of one's self leaves one empty of self in order to become full of God. This is the path of ascent in its most raw and natural form.

One must never forget the relationship of the physical to the spiritual. Although we have to remove physical attachments from our minds in order to ascend, we cannot violate the natural laws ordained by our Creator that govern the physical body. The body symbolically refers to the house of the king, whereas the soul refers to the face of the king. In other words, the major reason why the majority of people fail to make spiritual ascents is because they either deny or are ignorant of this basic principle of body/spirit balance.

One must enter the palace of the king before one can enter his throne room and thus before his presence. While some will desire to interpret this as referring to the

specific movements amongst spiritual palaces in the Heavenly realms, these cannot be accessed until one first climbs the proper ladder in the proper way.

One's body is symbolically called the temple of God. One must therefore serve in the holy temple and follow its rituals for proper observance. These are discussed in scripture and their symbolic applications are recorded in numerous works of mystical Judaic literature. One can reference the book Nefesh HaHayim, The Living Soul, by Rabbi Hayim of Volozin for an example of this. One's own body is sacred and has to be treated as such. One's own body is the receptacle of the soul and the first step along the path of ascent.

Therefore, one must take every precaution to safeguard one's body and to properly safeguard its health. This not only includes keeping a healthy diet but also includes keeping away from everything else that can have a negative affect on the body. This is why tobacco, drugs and alcohol use are frowned upon and shunned. These substances in excess can pollute the body, making it sick, therefore forcing the mind to focus on physical healing instead of allowing spiritual ascent.

Unless one first finds the palace of the king, one stands no chance in ever seeing his face. The source of blessing is the submission symbolized by bending the knee. These symbols used in the text both teach the same message. Physical health and spiritual health go hand in hand. Granted, not everyone can have complete robust health all of the time. Nevertheless, while uncontrollable illnesses can affect us from the outside, we can still control those illnesses and weaknesses that are under our influence. God will take care of His own, yet, we must also take care of ours.

When these prerequisites are met, then we open doorways to spiritual ascent and then in ascent we can join with those above who are at the level symbolized here as those "whose every tongue shall swear." These are those who know how to channel the flow the spiritual energy from below to above creating the scared circuit of spiritual energy.

Life force energy resides in the center of the body below the navel. It can descend below into sexual energy through the genitals or it can ascend and lead to spiritual ascent through the mouth, specifically the tongue. This is why physical prerequisites are required. They tame the physical energy in the body and enable it to focus in the proper direction, up and not down. I discuss more about this in my Sefer Yetzirah course.